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BREAKING

Prologue

Prin ran beside the hedge, holding out her hand so the leaves brushed over her fingers. The swishing sound of her skin along the plants was constant and relaxing, a welcomed break from hearing the Zayeth buzzing in her village, Threvanelt.

She didn't mind much that she heard everyone's Zayeth. Only when the village gathered did the humming and buzzing escalate too much for her to handle. Prin's mother told her that when she was just a child she would go into tantrums in large crowds, covering her ears and screaming until her parents led her away. They couldn't understand why at the time. Now that Prin was all grown up — ten was old after all — she had grown to enjoy the sounds she heard.

Still, it was relaxing, removing herself from the village proper to escape the humming from time to time. Running along the hedge that circled Threvanelt was one of her favorite things to do. It kept her the furthest possible distance from the others, and there was a familiarity in keeping that hedge beside her. The only sound was the quick stepping of her feet and the rushing of her hands through the leaves.

A bell chime from the village sounded faintly, but distinctly, that signaled midday. Prin looked up at the sky. The clouds were a lilac color, the lightest time of the day. She wondered, as she often did, how they knew when to darken and lighten each day. Some days were darker than others, but today was a bright day.

Prin stopped running and walked down the shallow slope away from the hedge. Trees covered the slope here on the west side of Threvanelt, but she didn't have to travel far before a slight buzzing sound reached her. This one had a particular skip to it; that would be Tayt, who tended much of Threvanelt's vegetation. Prin walked a bit further before the trees thinned and a great garden greeted her. The rows of vegetables spread wide before her, and she took a path down a grassy aisle between two plots.

Tayt walked ahead of her, and she soon caught up to him, his buzzing clear now in her mind. A soft hum with a long skip and then a quick second skip just after the first.

“Hello, Tayt! It’s a very light day today.” Tayt started and laughed, turning to greet her. His light gray skin was fair in the midday light, as would be all the people in Threvanelt.

“Yes, it is, Prin. How easy it is for you to startle me!” Tayt stepped to the side and motioned for Prin to continue past him. Prin smiled at him and pressed on, finishing her way through the garden.

A general buzzing in her mind steadily intensified as she reached the first houses of the village. Her home was set on the east side of Threvanelt. Rather than walk through the center where people would be attending the giving of the Zayeth, Prin instead rounded her way around the outskirts of the village, which had the general form of a circle. The humming never overwhelmed her this distance from the village center. The only time she ever needed to go there was when the Zayeth was replenished by one of the Syell’evnen, a keeper of the Zayeth. Prin never heard her own Zayeth though, so she never saw the reason for her partaking. Her parents insisted though, and it was nice seeing the people from her village assemble all together from time to time.

Prin rounded the north side of the village. The trees were sparse here, though their wide and thick canopies still darkened the ground and filtered the lighter lilac from the sky into a darker purple. Prin walked half in the shade and half in the light and examined her hands. The one hand was light gray in the light and her other in the shade was a darker gray, both hands having a slight blue tinge. Prin much preferred the midday light. Though she could see well enough even in the dark, the light brought a different kind of cheer to her.

The eastern slope of Threvanelt appeared from under the thinning canopy of trees. This side of the village didn’t have much for trees or bushes, just the open slope that rounded Threvanelt up to the hedge that surrounded it. Prin’s house was the furthest one on this side, her parents having moved to this distance once they realized it was everyone’s Zayeth that she was hearing.

Prin spotted her house, separated from the other outlying huts. There was nothing distinct about it, as all the homes in Threvanelt were constructed the same — layered bending and folding of the vy wood for the walls and the thatched roof it supported. The grass thinned and gave way to dirt the closer she approached her home. Along the front side facing the village were an assortment of tools, outside gear, wooden chairs, and a central fire pit that was used frequently. Prin pulled up one of the rough looking, but sturdy, seats and planted herself in front of the door.

It would still be some time before her parents filled her phial with the Zayeth and brought it to her to drink. She never noticed any difference when she replenished her Zayeth, if her spirit retained any at all. But when any other person drank, their thrumming sound would immediately louden.

A very slight buzzing again reached her as Threvanelt's people started to return to their homes after having replenished themselves with the Zayeth. This far away from everyone, the variety of intensities and inflections was bearable. Only when—

That's odd, Prin thought. She turned and looked inside the hut. She knew no one was there, but a very deep, rumbling sound reached from behind her. It didn't disappear when she waited; in fact, the longer she sat there listening the louder the sound seemed to grow. Prin stood and walked around her hut and stared up the long barren slope to the hedge at the top, which looked small from this far away. She closed her eyes.

Even with the humming behind her from the village, this new sound began to overpower them all. It was not at all like the buzzing sounds from the Zayeth. The sound wasn't even a hum at all, but like a deep drum whose one beat never faded, like the sound of rolling thunder.

Very quickly the sound escalated. It pounded and throbbed inside her skull. Prin pressed her hands against her ears even though she knew that wouldn't help. Just when she thought its intensity was becoming too much for her to bear, it stopped quicker than it had come on. The sudden quietness that it left in its wake unsteadied Prin for a moment, and she grabbed onto the side of her house to

stabilize herself. A ringing was left in her mind from the quick change, but soon that too faded completely.

A new sound, a welcomed normal humming appeared again, one with a soothing constant and hardly any inflections.

“Prin!” her mother called from the front of the house, having returned with a full phial of the Zayeth. When Prin didn’t answer, her mother called again. Prin took one last look up the slope. The hedged wall and naked hill seemed cold now to her, almost lifeless, as if they too had heard and felt that dreadful sound.

Prin turned from the hillside and returned to her mother. But that thundering roar still echoed in her mind.

Chapter One

Tanlen watched Sefyln gaze toward the overcast sky. The billowing clouds of dark purple from the night had begun to turn a lighter violet with the coming of morning. She held before her a rounded wooden contraption small enough for her to set steadily in the palm of her hand.

Tanlen stood a good distance in front of Sefyln and watched her absent eyes stare into the dark clouds above them. Her light steel-gray skin seemed to glow faintly, the dawn's violet light reflecting off her face in an entrancing way. The night clouds over Mezzehyt, Fyevna's sole city, never darkened like they did this far away from the city, and the color blend the dimness created felt foreign to him. Sefyln's long and flowing white hair lightened with each passing minute as night turned to day.

Though Sefyln was just shy of her twentieth year, three years Tanlen's junior, she held herself with a form and maturity that made her seem much older, as if she understood more and had experienced so much more in life than Tanlen ever could.

The sound of snapping twigs diverted Tanlen's attention to the forest that circled around the clearing where he stood. From under the darkness of the trees appeared Narait. Despite being accepted as a soldier, who were typically tall, Narait stood only an inch taller than Tanlen. Regardless of Narait's smaller height as a soldier, he was strong despite his lean frame. Nearly double Tanlen's age, there were noticeable lines across Narait's face that Tanlen's did not possess.

The dark gray armor Narait wore was made of fryaf, a material formed from the bark of a tree of the same name. The fryaf was several shades darker than Narait's skin tone and looked dull in the low light. The same fryaf protection was also made into a sheath for Narait's sword at his side. Narait approached Tanlen, softening his steps to avoid any more sudden sounds. Tanlen returned his attention to Sefyln.

"Anything?" Narait asked from Tanlen's side.

“No,” Tanlen whispered back with a voice that sounded light compared to Narait’s deeper voice. “And I don’t think she’s going to find anything either.”

“Seems she should. Threvanelt isn’t far now. There should be at least a hint of the Zayeth she can find.” Tanlen shook his head.

“No, no, I don’t think so. She should see something this close, I agree, but if there’s nothing for her to detect, then it’s probably what we’ve been thinking.”

“Hmph, maybe. Standing here though won’t tell us, will it? We aren’t more than a couple hours. How long has she been standing there?”

“Long enough,” Tanlen answered. Sefyln had indeed been standing there longer than was necessary. If there was no Zayeth for her to see, then reaching Threvanelt as quickly as possible should be their course of action. Tanlen took a couple steps closer to her.

“Sefyln,” Tanlen said quietly. “If you haven’t seen anything, maybe we should leave now.” Sefyln didn’t seem to notice what he said and continued her stance in the clearing.

“Sefyln,” Tanlen repeated, slightly louder. “I think—”

“Sefyln!” Narait shouted. Sefyln jumped at the shout and quickly cupped her empty hand over the phial she was holding.

“Don’t be a fool, Narait! I would have answered Tanlen when I was ready. What if I had dropped my Sye’veth!”

“You didn’t drop it. Now let’s get going. If you can’t see anything, then there’s no sense wasting away here.” Tanlen could see Sefyln wasn’t quite finished with Narait’s scolding, but rather than continue with the back and forth with her Fyevit, her personal protector, Sefyln instead pulled out from one of her robe’s pockets the seal for her round contraption.

“Actually,” Sefyln said. “I didn’t see nothing.” Then she paused for a moment. “Yes, I said that right. I didn’t see nothing, or I guess I saw something is what I should have said. That would have

been much clearer.” Sefyln began sealing her small round device. The process was intricate, consisting of a cap, wires, and clasps that encased the entirety of the wooden vessel.

“What did you see?” Tanlen asked. Sefyln had spoken to him on a multitude of occasions seeing the Zayeth, as all Syell’evnen could, but they were under a different circumstance now dealing with something other than what was normal. Despite the urgency Tanlen felt for an answer, Sefyln seemed to be taking her time with sealing her Sye’veth before answering the question. Perhaps she was making Narait wait longer before they left the clearing just to remind him who was in charge. That seemed like something Sefyln would do.

“I don’t know what I saw,” Sefyln said, and Narait scoffed.

“Oh, for the love of the Ell itself, let’s get on with it then.” Narait tightened the pack on his back and started to walk away.

“I don’t know what I saw!” Sefyln repeated, this time forcefully, stopping Narait in his tracks and forcing him to listen to her. “I don’t know, but it’s something I’ve never seen before or have heard of any other Syell’evnen seeing. Where there should have been the normal flowing Zayeth there was only black.”

“Black?” Tanlen asked. “What do you mean by black? Were you seeing something else?” Sefyln shook her head.

“That’s why I concentrated so long. I didn’t believe what I saw at first. I mean, how unusual would that be? But very distinctly I could see them. Little black specs that flowed toward Mezzehyt from the direction of Threvanelt. When dawn lightened the clouds though, they disappeared.”

Tanlen stared at Sefyln, his brows furrowed. While different forms of the Zayeth had been recorded in the past, albeit with little evidence, he couldn’t recall anyone having seen one with a black or spotted depiction. Tanlen had never read, of course, every book ever written on the Zayeth and its power, but he had read most, not to mention the hours and days spent listening to lectures about the

Zayeth's possible origins and known behaviors. As important as the Zayeth was to the preservation of each of their lives, it was remarkable how little they truly understood its power.

"We should follow Narait," Tanlen said, walking toward Sefyln's warder. Narait had already stepped into the darkened woods.

"You don't believe me?" Sefyln asked. Tanlen looked back and saw the Syell'evnin not having moved from her place in the middle of the glade. Her arms were crossed, a telling sign from Sefyln that she wasn't going to move on until the matter was settled.

"I believe you saw what you said you saw, Sefyln. Once we reach Threvanelt, I'm sure we'll have our answer. Our situation isn't entirely unique, you know. It's been shown that quite often in the past the Zayeth was cut off between the villages and Mezzehyit. Each time it was due to someone not following the proper systems in place with no other factors involved."

"I know," Sefyln said, walking now toward Tanlen. "It just seems odd. Especially since it began in a weakened state. That's how we first noticed it after all. You have your classes and your books, but I have my feelings and can actually see what's happening. I'm telling you, Tanlen, something is odd."

"Sefyln," Tanlen said. He thought he heard her slow in her step momentarily before continuing her normal pace. "You're right. There are things that you see that I have never studied or written a paper about. But there is a reason that a Syell'evnin is required to choose a Fyevnethin. When one of us—"

"I know, Tanlen," Sefyln said. "No need to explain to me what I know already like I'm a child." Tanlen nodded and let the conversation end. No need to press if it would only lead to further argument. Tanlen stepped to the side to let Sefyln walk in front of him and safely behind Narait.

The forest was almost too dark to walk through safely. Despite being able to see well in dim light, the lights present in the city of Mezzehyit made it more difficult for those from the city to see in the dark compared to people from the villages. Narait wished to press on as best as they could, even if that meant at a slower pace, but when Tanlen nearly rolled his ankle on a jutting tree root the

first night after setting out from Mezzehyt, Narait begrudgingly agreed not to travel at night. Actually, it had been Sefyln that convinced Narait. Narait ignored Tanlen's complaints until she spoke up for him.

Tanlen thought on multiple occasions bringing up the fact that he was a Fyevnethin, which should supersede Narait in any decision making. He didn't mind Sefyln making decisions, since the decisions she made were mostly sound, but Narait was a different story. Maybe one day he'd use his position against Narait, but he felt content avoiding that battle as long as possible.

Narait led the trio onward and set a pace faster than their first two days; Threvanelt was not far away. Tanlen couldn't help but think if he had not been so soft then they would have arrived the night before. Regardless, they would get there eventually, and then finally end the questions that had been pressing them. There was even a decent chance he would be back in his studies by the end of the week.

It *was* odd that the Zayeth dwindled from Threvanelt. Normally the villages surrounding Mezzehyt would have an assigned Syell'evnin who would make the venture from Mezzehyt every month to replenish the Zayeth in the villages to sustain the local people. Rarely would the Zayeth deplete before that time, and on those rare occasions, a Syell'evnin would show up just a couple days later from Mezzehyt, ready to replenish each village.

He knew something was odd about Threvanelt's when it was reported to him. Only two weeks after the Zayeth had been replenished there, its tether to Mezzehyt began to diminish. Tanlen frowned thinking about it. The Zayeth was either present, or it was not, so a dwindling of its power seemed incorrect. But if everything Sefyln and the other Syell'evnen saw was to be believed, and there was no reason not to believe them, then a dwindling of the Zayeth is exactly what they were dealing with.

Tanlen followed Sefyln, watching her feet as she stepped across rocks and over roots. The violet morning light pierced through the trees. He didn't need to watch his step if he just placed his to match Sefyln's. What made this simple task difficult was the patterns of purple that decorated the

ground. Some spots showed brilliantly bright from the cloud light, while others possessed a deeper color from the light shining through the leaves. Stepping through this palette was mesmerizing, and Tanlen had to look up and blink himself from the trance more than a handful of times.

“We must be getting close?” Sefyln asked. Tanlen looked up and nearly stumbled as he did.

“Yes,” Narait answered. “You’ll have your questions answered shortly.”

Presently the trees thinned and then eventually faded altogether. Before them was a low embankment lined with a thick hedge of bushes and branches along the top. The first thing Tanlen always noticed about these bushes were the large thorns that filled them. He stepped closer to the grassy ridge to approach and examine the hedge wall.

Narait shot his arm out, making him stop and said, “Just wait. They know we’re here.” Tanlen stepped back and looked along the hedge.

“I don’t see anyone.”

“Neither do I,” Sefyln said. “No one knows we’re coming either.”

“Wait,” Narait repeated. “Even if you tried to march in yourself, you’d be hard pressed to find the entrance. Just wait.” Tanlen looked at the hedge and then at Narait. The Fyevit was right. Though they had visited this village a few times previously, the entrance into Threvanelt was different on each of their visits. The people either found this useful in some way, or perhaps entertaining watching visitors seek out the new locale to enter the village. Tanlen watched Narait close his eyes and breathe deeply. Sefyln shrugged and sat on the ground. The grass was high and thick and enclosed her slight stature effortlessly and entwined with her flowing white hair.

Tanlen scratched his neck then pulled back his short hair a few times. Not that his appearance mattered much to Narait or Sefyln, but as a Fyevnethin from Mezzehyt, he should represent himself as best as he could. He looked down at his clothes. Gray seemed an odd choice as it was so contrary to the white robes he and the other Fyevnethen wore in Mezzehyt, but tradition for tradition’s sake

may be suitable enough reason from time to time. Whether he was fond of it or not, his garb would have to do.

Narait sighed loudly. He tapped the hilt of his sword as he looked along the wall of bushes. Seeing Narait's sword reminded Tanlen of his own and he reached down to feel for it. Unlike Narait's scabbard, Tanlen's was made of simple wood. The sword itself was not even his, but it was customary for anyone venturing out of Mezzehyt to carry one, save for the Syell'evnen.

Narait was visibly irritated now and shifted his weight from one side to the other and scratched the top of his bald head. In fact, this was the most irritated Tanlen had seen Narait since they were told they needed to make this special excursion.

"It's a good thing you're patient, Narait," Tanlen said. "This may take a while." Narait huffed and stepped toward the embankment. Unfortunately, this meant that he had missed Tanlen's smirk, but there would be other opportunities to take advantage of Narait's general disposition of irritation.

"They know we're here," Narait said as he began a stern march up the hill. "Where are they?"

When Narait had nearly reached the hedge wall, Sefyln stood and yelled, "Wait, stop!" Narait stopped and turned back.

"What is—"

"It's back, but worse," Sefyln said hurriedly. "The black Zayeth is strong now. The bits of black are thick and coming quickly over the hedge." Sefyln looked to be in a panic. Her eyes flashed back and forth above them, as if trying to locate the source of an echo. Tanlen stepped toward her to attract her attention.

"Sefyln," he said. Sefyln blinked and turned her gaze to him. "We'll find out soon enough. Look ahead and stay close to Narait." Sefyln, looking perturbed, nodded and moved forward. Tanlen looked up to see Narait waiting for Sefyln to come near his side before producing a journal and writing utensil from an inside pocket of his robe. Quickly he scribbled in short form what Sefyln had spoken to him before following Narait and Sefyln to the hedge.

“What are you going to do?” asked Sefyln, staying a half step behind Narait.

“Get through this shocking wall.” Narait reached the top of the short embankment and stood in front of the hedge. Tanlen settled his weight on one leg awkwardly on the slope and peered around Narait. The hedge was thick, so much so that Tanlen couldn’t see past the first couple feet of twisted and gnarled branches and full leaves. Thorns an inch long lined most of the branches.

“No need for weapons when you have a hedge at your disposal,” Tanlen said flatly. Narait mumbled something that Tanlen couldn’t make out.

“Only way through is by someone granting us access from the other side,” Narait said. “It appears though either we are being ignored or there’s no one on the other side.” Narait looked back at Tanlen with brows raised.

“So how do we get in?” Tanlen asked.

“We need to hurry,” Sefyln said. “Something is not right. The black. It’s just not right but I don’t know what it is.”

“Same as before?” Tanlen looked above them, knowing he couldn’t see what Sefyln could, but he stared anyway.

“It hasn’t stopped and there’s more, and they’re going faster toward Mezzehyit. Oh, wait. They are changing.” Sefyln turned away from the hedge and toward the forest, in the direction of Mezzehyit. She stumbled a couple steps down the hill, her sight focused above her.

“The black Zayeth reversed. Now it’s going *from* Mezzehyit *to* Threvanelt.” Sefyln’s arms were stiff at her side and her fingers flexed and tensed. Her brows furrowed and she shook her head at what she was seeing. Tanlen was close enough to reach out to her to steady her, but instead his Fyevnethin mind took hold, and he opened his small black journal once again to jot down what Sefyln was describing.

“Sefyln, I need you to tell me what you see,” he said, already writing down Sefyln’s most recent comments. Sefyln shook her head with closed eyes but then opened them with determination and nodded once.

“This Zayeth is very different,” she began. “Black, not like the normal shades of violet. But it’s more than that. They are disjointed.”

“They?” Tanlen asked, pausing and looking up at Sefyln.

“Yes, *they*. The Zayeth normally is like a stream, a steady flow. These black—” Sefyln paused a moment. “Black droplets are separated. They look like specs, but some are considerably larger than others. And they’re erratic. They are all moving directionally the same, but they shake and jump back and forth along the way, like they are unsure of themselves.”

Sefyln paused and Tanlen glanced at Narait to assess his reaction. The warder still stood facing the hedge of thorns. Tanlen doubted Narait was even paying attention to Sefyln. Something as significant as a change in the Zayeth and he just stood there. Tanlen focused his attention again on the gaping Sefyln.

“You said it’s flowing toward Threvanelt. What do you mean?” This time Sefyln looked away from the light violet clouds and glared at Tanlen.

“What do you mean what do I mean? Exactly what I said. It’s not moving toward Mezzehyit, but to Threvanelt.” The Syell’evnin reverted her attention again to the air above her.

“It’s just odd,” Tanlen said. “I don’t remember ever reading the Zayeth reversing its course.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m lying or crazy,” Sefyln snapped.

“Something’s wrong,” Narait suddenly said.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you!” Sefyln yelled.

“Something different than your Zayeth. Beyond the—”

“It’s not *my* Zayeth” Sefyln huffed. “It belongs to—”

“Of course,” Narait said as he waved a hand. “There’s something else though. Look.” Narait nodded to the barrier of bushes and branches. Tanlen noticed immediately something different about the hedge. The leaves, the branches, all of it seemed darker. Not only that, but the strength and immovability that its presence exerted seemed to wane. Leaves hung dully from their stems and the branches took on a sickly look.

Narait stepped closer to the natural wall and pulled off a leaf. The Fyevit barely tugged as the leaf willingly departed from its dying bush. He rubbed the leaf between his fingers and sniffed it once before dropping it. Then he turned to Tanlen and Sefyln and lifted his opened hand. Dark gray splotches coated the tips of his fingers.

“It’s decayed,” Narait said matter-of-factly.

“It’s gone now,” Sefyln whispered. She stared past Narait and Tanlen at the colorless barrier. “But the plants continue to wane. Look.” Tanlen watched Threvanelt’s hedge wither at an accelerated rate, and for a moment thought his eyes must be playing tricks on him. The twisted branches and bunched leaves simply withered and fell until they lay flat, dead, on the ground.

They were now free to enter the village.

Tanlen glanced at Sefyln who was staring forward at the top of the ridge that would lead down to the village. Narait rested his hand on the pommel of his sword at his side and slowly began to crest the small hill. Sefyln followed closely behind.

Tanlen let them march on for a moment by themselves while he readied his journal and pencil again. He had only a couple pages written since they left Mezzehyt, but that would change with the recent events. He quickly scratched some details about the decaying of the plants. He could return later to provide a full description, but in the case things changed even further, he needed to jot down the present state of the vegetation to prepare an accurate record. Tanlen finished his last few thoughts as he began walking and then slipped the book away again safely to his side.

He expected to hear the crunch of the branches under his feet, but all life had been drained from the plants. Tanlen could not smell any mold, but the foliage was most definitely withered away to a decayed state. The ground felt mushy with each step like he was stepping on patches of moss. Cresting the hill finally provided him with a view of Threv—

“What happened?” Tanlen said to himself. He paused in his steps as he gazed down at Threvanelt. The small village rested in a wide depression in the ground, surrounded by the hill and, prior to just now, the hedge that shut it in. The sudden plague that destroyed the natural barrier had also wilted every blade of grass and thing that took root around the entire hollow. Even the trees that canopied the village looked sullen, their leaves either having fallen off or hanging dully on limp branches. The killing of the vegetation was just one unusual thing though.

Threvanelt was empty.

Save for Narait and Sefyln, who were slowly approaching the first small home, no one in Tanlen’s view moved. There were no children playing about, no one investigating and puzzling over the sudden rot that had infected the village. It was simply abandoned. Tanlen pulled out his book once again. *Why even bother putting this thing away? There’s enough here for me to write the day away.*

Tanlen walked slowly toward the village, steadying himself along the way as he wrote detailed descriptions of the state of the village. He wrote now in long form, preferring the full spelling of his words to tell the story that presented itself to him. Tanlen even wrote a quick note about Narait and Sefyln as they walked into the village. Perhaps unnecessary, but still an apt depiction of a Syell’evnin and her Fyevit exploring the unique event.

Narait stepped cautiously into Threvanelt, his hand folded around the pommel of his sword. The tension of something obviously wrong in the village did not strike the Fyevit with fear or worry. No, Narait embraced the unknown.

Sefyln followed Narait closely, stepping where he stepped. Narait didn't necessarily mind having to act as a personal guard for a Syell'evnin, except that it was excruciatingly boring most of the time. The position had been created so long ago that he didn't even know if a Fyevit had ever even used his blade in the past or if it had only ever been for tradition. Even the trips to the outlying villages were little more than a change of scenery. None of Narait's travels now delivered proper intensity like his time at the Vwi'ev — the Breaking.

Shock the Vwi'ev, this is my purpose now. Narait had told himself that too many times to count, but in this moment it may actually matter. The Vwi'ev had given Narait purpose in life, what he had always thirsted to do. Fight. When all that ended, he was forced into becoming a Fyevit.

"Sefyln," Narait said, lowering his voice only slightly. "Do you see any of that black stuff anymore?"

"You mean the Zayeth?" Sefyln snapped.

"Whatever you want to call it, do you see it?" This girl wasn't so bad to deal with, except for her incessant correcting of everything.

"I don't. I see nothing now. Except of course our personal Zayeth."

"We are still good, yes? Only been a couple days."

"Yes," Sefyln answered. "We haven't begun to fade just yet." Narait nodded and continued his steady walk to the center of Threvanelt. The fact that Sefyln and the other Syell'evnen could see the life force of the Zayeth within each person – within him – had always made Narait feel uncomfortable, like someone were inside his mind listening to his thoughts.

The village was bereft of any inhabitants. Not just the presence of people, but any activity as well. The fire pits outside of homes and in social gathering areas had been out for at least a few days. Buckets of water that set out for washing had soiled. If they had arrived a few days before, Narait thought that still no one would be present to welcome them.

Sefyln tapped Narait on his shoulder.

“There,” Sefyln said, pointing past the next set of homes. Narait could see a large opening between the homes, the center of Threvanelt, and where the village kept its Etteth, the holder for the Zayeth.

“Why do they keep theirs in such an open area? Waste of space.”

“Why wouldn’t they?” Sefyln asked incredulously. “I think it’s a wonderful thing for a village to display their Etteth A welcoming sight to everyone.”

“Ahh, so welcoming in fact that the people never want to leave, huh?” Sefyln huffed and marched past Narait.

“Sefyln, I need to go—”

“If we were in danger, we would know by now, Narait.” Sefyln hurried between two homes to the middle of Threvanelt. Narait stammered under his breath and followed after her.

They just don’t understand, Sefyln told herself. She barely paid attention to her surroundings as she left Narait behind her. *They’ll never get it, not like me*. Sefyln forced herself to stop and take a deep breath. She needed more time to calm herself but didn’t want Narait to catch up to her. She walked smoothly, stepping from between two of Threvanelt’s empty homes and into the middle of the small village.

Unlike some of the other villages that skirted Mezzehyt, the villagers of Threvanelt had decided to keep their town center empty. Grass — rotted now — would have filled the area, and the only structure, a tall stone basin, stood in the middle. Sefyln walked across the openness. The Zayeth that normally would be a colorful display of swirling purples around the basin was nonexistent. She didn’t quite know why, but the lack of the life force made Sefyln feel sad. What would have been an opportunity to see again the Zayeth concentrated in one place had instead turned into something hollow and foreboding.

The stone container was simple here. Other villages Sefyln visited displayed theirs sometimes on an ornate pedestal or decorated the surrounding area with beautiful flora. Threvanelt had decided

to set theirs plainly in the opening, fastened to the ground on a forgetful wooden base. The vessel itself was tall, nearly to Sefyln's neck. It was rounded and narrowed its way from the base to the lip. Inside the Etteth was where water resided as the conduit for the Zayeth.

The narrow lip was sealed with a natural filter made from the same fryaf armor that Narait wore. The piece of fryaf was pressed over the lip by a series of buckles and clasps that shut it firmly. The material would prevent pollution of the water, but still allow the Zayeth to pass freely in and out of the vase. At least that's what comforted the people. Sefyln knew nothing could spoil the Zayeth, regardless of what physical contaminants found their way into the Etteth.

Sefyln reached for the first clasp of the Etteth to undo when she heard the sound of pencil to parchment. She turned her attention to the side of the clearing where Tanlen stood. The Fyevnethin faced her, his eyes darting from paper to her, back to his pages, then up again to the Etteth. Sefyln could understand why Tanlen's job was important, but did he have to be so obnoxious about it? She probably shouldn't have been so annoyed by him journaling her every action. At least he took an interest in the Zayeth, unlike Narait.

But did he have to be so loud? Did they train to write with such force? Sefyln shook her head and continued unclasping the buckles to the Etteth.

Tanlen saw Sefyln glare at him like he was an uninvited guest to her formal party. He normally would not have been taking detailed notes like this for such a simple task as replenishing the Etteth, but with the uniqueness of the situation, this could be something never seen before.

At this thought he paused and looked up at the lavender mid-morning clouds. *If only I could actually see it.* Relying on verbal details from Sefyln told the story each time of the Zayeth's movement and activity. Not once had anything been out of sorts in their time together. Even though Tanlen's desire to see the Zayeth was difficult to ignore, he was able to do so for the convenient reason that nothing exciting ever happened with the Zayeth.

Now though, with the black specs that Sefyln described, Tanlen was anxious to discover what she would find from the Etteth. Something was happening with the Zayeth here. Whether or not the activity still lingered would be discovered soon enough. The key was getting Sefyln to describe for him in each moment what was happening so that his story was accurate. Tanlen shook his head again.

If only I could see.

Sefyln had started unclasping the fryaf cap and Tanlen held his pen ready. She took her time finishing the last few and pulling back the ties. She took a deep breath and quickly removed the top.

Tanlen held his pencil, as well as his breath, in anticipation for something to happen. Narait had done the same apparently. He stood at the edge of the clearing as well, and he stared unblinkingly at Sefyln should he need to assist in any way. Sefyln stood on her toes to be able to lean over and peer directly down into the Etteth.

“It’s plain,” she said, raising her voice so both Tanlen and Narait could hear and beginning to undo her Sye’veth. “No Zayeth at all.”

“What are you doing?” Tanlen asked. Sefyln cocked her head at him, just slight enough so he could see her glare before she returned her attention to her sealed contraption.

“What do you think I’m doing, Tanlen? I’m doing what we came here to do; fill this Etteth.”

“Wait!” Tanlen shouted, striding forward with pencil tip still placed on his notebook. “I’d like to see.” Sefyln sighed and held her Sye’veth above the Etteth, waiting for Tanlen to approach. Tanlen, in stride, finished jotting down a few more short notes before crossing the distance.

“Right,” he said. “Go for it.” Without waiting longer, Sefyln lowered the Sye’veth to the rim of the stone Etteth and poured a few drops in. Both Tanlen and Sefyln peered inside the Etteth. It was dark inside, the narrow neck not allowing much light to pass through. At first, Tanlen thought Sefyln was being careless in her describing the water as plain. There was no distinction between the water and the walls of the vessel with how dark it was.

“Move out of the way,” Sefyln said, nudging him back. Tanlen watched Sefyln peer into the vessel. She shut one eye and stared with the other, switching back and forth when the opened eye began to dry. Sefyln sighed several times, shifting her weight sharply back and forth in irritation. Tanlen heard Narait approach from behind them.

“Sefyln, maybe if you add more Zayeth to the Etteth, it would—”

“Yes, of course!” Sefyln shouted, still poking her sight down the vessel’s neck. “What a bright idea, wasting even more of our Zayeth. Why ever didn’t they make you Syell’evnin?” Tanlen shook his head and glanced back at Narait. The soldier either didn’t notice Sefyln’s sudden sharpness or didn’t care.

Sefyln finally looked up from the Etteth and closed her eyes.

“Sorry, Narait, I just don’t know what’s happening.” There was a pause, but neither Narait nor Tanlen said anything, so she continued. “I can’t do much more other than throw some more Zayeth at it, but it’s just a waste. There’s no more of that black-spotted Zayeth, just nothing. I don’t know what to do.” Tanlen cleared his throat and took a step forward.

“Can I look, please?” This time Sefyln stepped aside and walked past Narait, separating herself from her two companions. Tanlen tucked his journal and pencil away and stepped up to the Etteth again, staring down the neck with both eyes.

It was difficult to see anything at all in the stone vessel. The Syell’evnin would normally see the Zayeth swirling inside the Etteth, but with it being tarnished in some way, short of pouring out the contents, making guesswork by staring into its dark depths was all that could be done. Chances are the Zayeth was just depleted and all that was left was plain water, the simple medium that allowed the Zayeth to do its work. But that wouldn’t answer what happened to the Zayeth Sefyln had just poured in.

Tanlen blinked several times, looking up at the purple and gray clouds, resetting his focus. Once more he looked down and—

Black. Deep black.

Tanlen was no longer standing over the basin peering down into it, but instead the darkness had somehow reached up to him and covered him. He did not feel panicked though. A coolness started to spread over him. He couldn't sense from where it came, either from within or without, but a coolness permeated his skin and flooded his veins. Still, all Tanlen saw was black.

A muffled noise interrupted Tanlen's dark trance. It sounded like someone yelling into a blanket. Tanlen blinked, or at least he thought he blinked, but there was no difference between closing his eyes and keeping them open. The blackness was there surrounding him and held him.

Louder now the muffled noises sounded. Tanlen tried to ignore them, shut them out, but they persisted. Anger swelled in him now, the coolness beginning to rescind its presence. *No*, he thought. *Not yet*. But the coolness reversed its course, bringing back his normal body heat. The final tingling of the cold ran along his spine, sending a last shiver through him.

Then the darkness peeled back, allowing him to see the violet light of day again. The muffled yelling was clearer now, and Tanlen knew it was Sefyln shouting. His normal faculties returning, Tanlen attuned his senses further away from the dark and back to his very real surroundings. Sefyln's voice was clear now as the last of the blackness retreated from him.

"Tanlen! Tanlen! What is this fool's problem? Tan—"

"I'm back, I — I'm here." Tanlen glanced to his side and found Sefyln in disarray. The Syell'evnin's face was flushed from yelling, and she gritted her teeth at him.

"And what was that all about?" Sefyln asked. Her tone suggested an immediate answer was the only appropriate response.

"What?" Tanlen asked, "I don't know. What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? What do I mean! I mean you were just standing there, glazed look, eyes looking nowhere, not answering us." Tanlen rubbed his eyes and shook his head, stepping away from the Etteth.

“Just a trance is all,” Tanlen said. “Lost in thought and my focus just locked in.”

“Oh, locked in? Is that what they call it when you lose your Zayeth?” Tanlen started.

“What? No, I don’t—” Narait stepped beside Sefyln, his presence silencing Tanlen. While the soldier's face was calm and collected, his hands were white knuckled on his sword's hilt, a detail Tanlen easily spotted. Tanlen lifted his eyes and stepped back.

“Alright, maybe you can answer me, since I apparently have no idea what’s happening. What's going on, what’s happened?” Sefyln scrunched her face and shook her head. She eyed him up and down a few times, then searched above and around him, eyes darting back and forth in bewilderment. At last, she looked into Tanlen’s eyes.

“Your Zayeth is gone, Tanlen. It’s gone.”

Chapter Two

Tanlen wrote furiously in his black journal by the light of the fire. The green flame cast just enough light for him to see his writing, even if he had to tilt the book at a slightly awkward angle toward the light. The fire took up a space merely the size of a fist, but despite its size the dassep flower could burn for days.

Details of Threvanelt emerged in his mind of all he had seen at the desolate village. Tanlen flipped back a few pages to reference what he had jotted down earlier that day when they arrived at Threvanelt. The detail was good, if a bit rushed, but that was typical when attempting to capture surroundings in the moment. Now that he had the opportunity and time, he reviewed his material from the day and edited the information to make it cleaner, sprinkling in descriptions that came to mind for additional effect.

Tanlen closed his eyes and recalled the sequence of events at the small village. The details were vivid, as they would be for the next few days. Maintaining the images was not difficult to manage, so long as not too much time had passed since the event. Still, Tanlen wished to finish his records as soon as possible after the events.

Sefyln sighed beside him, but he ignored her. She made several — four to be exact — vain attempts to attract his attention. Tanlen knew how desperately she wanted to address the situation, that his Zayeth had suddenly disappeared from him getting too close to the tainted Etteth. Well, at least Sefyln said it was tainted, but Tanlen couldn't be sure exactly the cause of the problem, if a problem is what it could be labeled. After all, he felt fine.

Sefyln sighed yet again, the shortest interval between her futile distractions. It wouldn't be long now before she came up with some clever quip to really gather his attention and have him put his notes away. Sometimes Tanlen allowed those moments to come, as they were typically quite witty. However, he had just finished his last thoughts, squeezing in the final few words at the very bottom

of the page. Fidgeting with his pencil between his fingers for a few moments longer, Tanlen finally closed his journal and slipped both the book and his writing utensil in his satchel that sat beside him.

Taking a sigh of his own, Tanlen stretched and looked at Sefyln.

She wasted no time and said, “Do your fancy notes have anything to say for your Zayeth disappearing?” Tanlen smiled.

“Only that one of us three showed any real concern, and she can hardly be trusted.” Sefyln reached back and slapped his arm. This one stung a little, and had he cared to he would have admitted it, but he thought it best instead not to give her the satisfaction.

“It’s not funny, Tanlen! Something is actually wrong with you, and I’m not just talking about your stupidity. Your Zayeth is *gone*, Tanlen. That’s not good.” At these last few words Sefyln leaned in closer, as if that would make her point clearer. Tanlen’s smile faded slowly as he examined Sefyln’s visage. He was used to her passion and perhaps made light of it too frequently. But this time he saw more than just surface level concern.

Her brows were not quite furrowed, so she wasn’t angry, at least entirely, with him. Her eyes stared back at his. He noted real concern there and — fear? Yes, that was it. Sefyln was scared. Not for herself, of course, but for him. Though he wouldn’t have difficulty recalling this conversation later for his notes, he made sure to make a mental note of her in this moment. Emotions seemed to be the least important of details when reporting on the facts of the matter, but maybe there was something here that could differentiate him even further from his cohorts, the other Fyevnethin.

“Noted,” he said aloud to his own thoughts. Sefyln sat back and scrunched her face.

“Noted?” she asked.

“Sorry,” Tanlen said, “Just thinking. Alright, Sefyln, tell me. What happened to my Zayeth?” Sefyln sat upright again and set her hands in her lap. For a moment she didn’t say anything, staring instead at the fire. The green flame reflected off her dark eyes, and for a moment Tanlen watched in

a daze the fire that was there. Of course, those eyes were typically fiery anyway. Sefyln was a fierce flame all on her own.

Sefyln turned her head and eyed him now. That innate fire had returned.

“Tanlen, I need you to listen to me now. What I don’t need is for you to make light of the situation or dismiss my words.” Tanlen opened his mouth to answer, but his companion continued.

“Tanlen, your Zayeth is gone. Maybe though gone is not the right thing to say. It’s *gone* gone. It hasn’t returned to Mezzehyt like it should. It’s not — not somewhere where it’s waiting to be restored. It’s disappeared; it doesn’t exist anymore. I don’t understand how this doesn’t make you concerned when you seem to be concerned with every little detail of every event in every day of your life. I’d recommend though that you be concerned ever so slightly. That’s just a suggestion though from someone who has done nothing but interact with the Zayeth her entire life.”

Tanlen continued to stare at Sefyln. More often than not her passion, whether it manifested as excitement or worry or some other form, took the forefront. One response he needed to put to rest was pointing out to her that while she may see the Zayeth and carry out its duties, it was he who had studied and knew the Zayeth better than her.

When he didn’t respond, Sefyln opened her mouth to speak again, but then shut it. She did this a few times to Tanlen’s amusement, when at last she said, “I’m done now. That’s all I wanted to say.” Sefyln turned toward the fire again, wiping her trousers to smooth out the wrinkles — a habit of hers Tanlen took note of not long after they had met.

Tanlen knew at this point he could end the conversation by either writing in his notebook again or just sitting there and remaining silent. He *was* curious though what happened to his Zayeth. What an interesting thing if it simply just decided to leave him. He didn’t doubt his Zayeth was absent at this time. Sefyln could easily see that. But nonexistent? That seemed far-fetched, but until some concrete evidence or detail showed itself, it was all speculation. It had been some time since Tanlen

bridged the gap between fact and speculation, and maybe this would be a fun endeavor to take on at this time.

“Sefyln,” he said. Sefyln started slightly, obviously surprised he wanted to continue talking. “What do you think happened?” Sefyln sat even straighter and took a deep breath.

“I’m not exactly sure. I mean, I know that your Zayeth is completely gone now. Even after having you sip from my Sye’veeth” — Sefyln gestured to the round device hanging from her neck — “your Zayeth did not return. That’s never happened. Never.” While Sefyln hadn’t studied the subject matter on replenishing the Zayeth like he had, what she said was true.

“So, I’m unique is what you’re saying,” Tanlen smirked.

“Hmm, hardly. The situation though is, of course, unique. It’s all so — so wrong, and frightening.”

“Frightening?” Tanlen asked. “How is that?” Sefyln shook her head.

“Frightening because of your soul, of course.” Sefyln looked at the fire and her fingers tensed on her knees. “Tanlen, without the Zayeth, there’s nothing preserving your spirit, your soul. I don’t even know how the lack of Zayeth will affect you physically, but whatever damage that may be done to your body doesn’t compare to dying without a full soul.” Tanlen blinked several times. The moments when Sefyln talked seriously about the Zayeth and her ideas on its effects were awkward and were usually proceeded by silence from both himself and Narait.

“Sefyln,” he said. “We have recorded on several occasions when an individual did not possess the Zayeth for days and, in a few instances, weeks. No physical deficiencies were noted in any of those cases.”

“*Physical* deficiencies, but no one has been able to study someone who’s died without the Zayeth, have they?” Tanlen didn’t respond but shook his head. “Have they?” Sefyln repeated, this time sterner.

“No, Sefyln, we haven’t. Unfortunately, once someone has died, it is very difficult to have them run through tests and questionnaires.” Sefyln scoffed and turned herself away from Tanlen.

“I wish you would take me seriously,” she said. A laugh sounded from across the fire. Narait sat there with his arms crossed and his back leaned against a tree. Until now, the Fyevit had kept silent, and silent now he was after his intrusion.

“What’s so funny?” Sefyln asked, begrudgingly bringing her Fyevit into the conversation.

“If I’m welcomed to speak plainly?” Sefyln nodded. “You ask for your intelligent young Fyevnethin over her to take you seriously, when neither of you have spared even a second to look at the real danger here.

“Sefyln, quit worrying about Tanlen’s shocking soul. It’s not like any of us knows where our souls go after we’re spent here. No—” Narait raised a hand to preemptively stop Sefyln from responding to that last comment. “Please spare me just a minute if you would be kind enough my Syell’evnin. Where our souls go and how they go and what role the Zayeth plays is subjective, plain and simple. You may not like it, but hey, I don’t like having to babysit, yet here I am.

“And Tanlen. Why don’t you, for just a moment, lift your nose from that little journal of yours, and think for yourself about what happened today. Do any of those notes contain even a hint of what you think may have happened today, or did you spend a page describing what I chose to adorn myself with for today’s endeavors?” Tanlen turned slightly red at this, not because he was angry, but because he did in fact make a note each morning of what each wore, as he found starting the day with simple descriptions helped him best. It didn’t matter if their traveling clothes were the same day to day.

“Both of you need to stop the incessant bickering and actually think about what happened at Threvanelt means for all of us.” Narait sighed so heavily Tanlen envisioned that he had somehow sunk himself even further into the tree he leaned against. Despite Narait’s chiding over Tanlen and his constant journaling, he pulled out his writing things again and jotted a couple quick notes.

“Alright, Narait,” he said. “You’ve obviously had time to mull things over. What do you think happened today?”

Narait was quick to answer. “I don’t know.” Sefyln sighed with irritation and Tanlen cocked his head at him.

“And is this conclusion based on your critical thinking of the matter at hand, after a few long exhaustive hours?” Tanlen asked. Sefyln giggled at this and Tanlen felt relief at her reaction. Narait though ignored the teasing.

“I don’t know what happened,” Narait repeated. “However, I’ve thought about it some.”

“And?” Tanlen pressed.

“I think it all must have something to do with the Ell,” Narait answered. This time it was Sefyln who laughed, heartedly if a bit forced.

“The Ell?” she asked incredulously. Sefyln leaned forward toward Narait until Tanlen thought she may topple off the rock she was sitting on. “Narait, the Ell doesn’t control what the Zayeth does. We utilize it — preserve it — whatever you want to say we do with it. But causing it to change like this, and in such a dark way? That’s not the Ell, Narait.” Tanlen scratched a few more notes, highlights of the conversation so far to catch up to the dialogue at hand.

“Of course you’d think that,” Narait challenged. “You’re a shocking Syell’evnin, a member of the Ell. Nothing to get upset about.” He said this as Sefyln started to cut him off, but she quickly sat back and kept her mouth closed. “All I’m saying,” Narait continued, “is that while you are out here using the Zayeth, what’re the Threvell doing in all their free time? They aren’t married. They don’t parade around the city. Can’t be that difficult to maintain a big bowl of water. Something’s obviously happened to your Zayeth, and they’ve let it happen.” Narait muttered something else that Tanlen couldn’t distinguish. Based on Narait’s distaste for the Threvell, the leading members of the Ell, he assumed it was something against them that was too vulgar to say in front of Sefyln.

It was quiet now. Sefyln was clearly pondering her next words. Tanlen marked a couple more notes down on his paper, setting reminders of the tone and emotion so far in the conversation. The small fire flashed momentarily as it ate away at the dassep. Tanlen looked up and, for a moment in the brightness, his gaze met Narait's dark eyes. While the connection only lasted a second or two more before the flame settled again, it still made Tanlen uncomfortable.

"Narait," Sefyln said, staring into the dark canopy above them as if still lost for thought. "You can think what you want of the Ell. I don't care. You've been good to me as my Fyevit and that's all I can ask for." She lowered her face now, staring at the ground and shaking her head. "I admit I don't know how our souls are tied to the Zayeth, but with surety I'm convinced that it's so. I can *see* life in us when we replenish with the Zayeth, and I see it drain away when it depletes, as I see yours and mine draining now. I'm not going to convince you. I just want to make it clear, whether you see it the way I do or not, that we should all be concerned about Tanlen. If not for his soul, then certainly that something has altered in some way that is contrary to what we all have known and lived."

Sefyln slunk down from her seat onto the grass floor and leaned against the rock. She tucked her knees under her chin and stared flatly at the fire. Tanlen nodded slightly and took down another quick note. This speech was particularly worth recording. Not just because it was those overlooked details that had separated him from others and helped him enter the Fyevneth where he trained to become a Fyevnethin, but also because Sefyln was interesting and so studying her behavior proved a satisfying endeavor for him.

"I still think the shocking Threvell messed up," Narait said. Tanlen glanced at the Fyevit who was scratching his bald head. Narait couldn't resist adding finality to his thoughts. Sefyln stayed in her position, the bright flames reflecting off her dark eyes and lightening her gray skin.

"Well," Tanlen said, closing his journal once again. "I'll say this. I'm not concerned with my Zayeth gone." He thought that this would yield a reaction from Sefyln, but apparently the night's conversation already had her spent. "I'm not saying that there's no link between my spirit, or soul —

if I even have one. But whatever's happened, it's obviously important that each of us is concerned in our own ways. Well, for me I'd say less concern and more intrigue. I mean, I can't recall anyone ever having just lost their Zayeth, and with what happened at Threvanelt, there's something going on."

"Out with it, Tanlen," Narait sighed, staring at the fire and looking disinterested.

"Right," Tanlen continued. "Well, I think that no matter the situation, my soul damned or not, we should look further into this, yes?" Sefyln shook her head which still rested on her knees.

"No, we need to go back to Mezzehyit. The Threvell needs to examine you." Narait huffed at this, but Sefyln continued, "I don't know what's happened, but if anyone does know it'd be them."

"Of course it'd be them," Narait said. "If they're the ones that have failed, they'd know about it."

"Oh, come on, Narait." Sefyln did lift her head this time. "I feel stupid for just engaging with you about this, but you won't shut up. There's no point in the Threvell concealing a mistake this big. It'd be just as insane if the Itanayth were to collapse—"

"The Itanayth, our Cloudwall, collapse? Ha!" Narait mouth widened with an entertained smile. "Fyevna's barrier has held for centuries, all on its own I might add. No, I'd take my chances with the Itanayth over the Ell, thank you." Sefyln's face twisted in an odd way as she looked for words to shoot back at Narait, but rather than unleash on her protector, she instead pivoted the conversation back to making a decision. Tanlen wondered if Sefyln noticed the sly smile Narait maintained.

"We need to return to Mezzehyit so the Threvell can look at Tanlen. Whether or not there is a simple solution, at least they can examine you."

"It's *not* that simple," Narait said. "Even if you are right and they can help Tanlen, that doesn't automatically bring back an entirely deserted village." Tanlen nodded this time and waited for Sefyln to agree.

"You're right," she conceded. "If this happened to one, it could happen to another." Tanlen finished writing a couple more quick notes before closing his journal yet again and tucking it away.

“Well,” he said. “The nearest village is Fyevath.”

“No,” Sefyln said. “I’d rather visit another closer to Mezzehyt. That way we are still moving nearer to the city.”

“Sefyln,” Narait said, standing this time and stretching. “If I am right and the Threvell has failed and allowed something sinister to slip into our borders, then the closer we are to the border of Fyevna, the better position we will be in to test that theory. At the very least, if I’m wrong, we’ll know quickly. Then we can travel back to Mezzehyt.” Sefyln looked at Tanlen to see if he had any more to add, but he didn’t say anything. Undoubtedly, Tanlen’s preference would be to venture nearer to the edge of Fyevna where he could potentially witness the Vwi’ev — the Breaking.

“Alright,” Sefyln sighed. “We’ll go to Fyevath. But we make quick work of it, yes?” She eyed each of them who nodded in turn. “Good.”

As each prepared their bed for the night and before Narait snuffed out the fire, Tanlen caught Sefyln staring at him. Her head lay on her arm that she used as a makeshift pillow. Her dark eyes stared at his. He waited for her to say something, but her lips twisted instead into a slight frown, and she rolled the other way.

Tanlen then laid himself on the cool ground and fell asleep.